

## Against the Grain

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### People Profile: Katherine Skinner

Editor

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of each member — our members learn how to run and operate their own preservation node for the network, building their internal knowledge of the preservation process. They also are given opportunities to contribute to the software development efforts undertaken by the **Cooperative**.

The mission of the **MetaArchive Cooperative** is to support, promote, and extend our collaborative approach to distributed digital preservation practices. We have made our organizational model available to others as an example of how to create shared digital infrastructure. To this end, we not only run our own network, but also provide training and consulting assistance to other groups that wish to found similar preservation networks. We host workshops and make all of our documentation freely available to other collaborative projects and programs.

Unlike the public **LOCKSS** network, where participant libraries preserve journal content in which they all have a vested interest, the collections in the **MetaArchive** network are the unique holdings of each participant library and archive. In other words, **MetaArchive's** members cannot rely on the incentive that drives participation in the public **LOCKSS** network — a shared body of content to which all subscribe and upon which all rely. Instead, the **MetaArchive** network requires a strong commitment between constituent institutions — each participates in order to preserve their own data in exchange for preserving other institutions' data.

So what *are* the drivers in this **PLN** scenario? Topping the list are a strong sense of community engagement and a strong belief in the library's cultural stewardship role. Our members share the conviction that libraries have a vested interest in preserving their own digital assets. Each has determined that they do not want to cede all of their digital preservation activities to external groups, and do want to participate in creating their own preservation solution. Building alone is a costly proposition, so these institutions have coupled their resources in order to achieve their preservation goals in a community-based effort.<sup>4</sup>

To enable this, **MetaArchive** formed as a *cooperative*, not a vendor. **MetaArchive's** members do not pay for services, but rather make an investment to create and sustain their own preservation infrastructure. The **Cooperative** is more than a technical solution for preservation. It also functions as a learning environment in which members gain experience in developing and enacting a full preservation plan for their assets. Each member both contributes to and benefits from the expertise and the technical infrastructure developed by the overall community. In keeping with these principles, membership fees are kept at the absolute minimum required for the operation of the **Cooperative**, and range from \$300 to \$5K per year, together with a fee of \$2 every 3 years per 1 GB of content contributed. These

continued on page 40

## Katherine Skinner & Martin Halbert

# against the grain people profile

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**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Dr. Katherine Skinner is the Digital Projects Librarian at **Emory University** and provides leadership for the university's digital projects that are supported through grants or other sponsored funding sources. In this role, she has coordinated efforts involving interdisciplinary interest groups from more than three dozen universities worldwide, including faculty members (in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities), information technologists, librarians, curators, and campus administrators. She is a Co-Principal Investigator on the **SouthComb Project (Andrew W. Mellon Foundation)**, the **MetaArchive Project (Library of Congress)**, and the **MetaArchive: A Sustainable Digital Preservation Service Project (NHPRC)**. She's a founder and an editorial board member of the peer-reviewed Internet journal, *Southern Spaces* and a consultant on the **TransAtlantic Slave Trade Database Projects** at **Emory (NEH)**. She recently co-edited a monograph entitled *Strategies for Sustaining Digital Libraries* with **Martin Halbert**.

**Katherine** has a Ph.D. from **Emory University** and a B.A. from the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. **Katherine** worked in academic/non-profit marketing at **Mindpower, Inc.**, prior to starting graduate school in 1999. She is married and has a son.



**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Dr. Martin Halbert is Director for Digital Innovations at **Emory University**. **Martin** directs a variety of digital library research projects and services for the **Emory General Libraries**. He is responsible for researching and leading library information technology initiatives, including all digital scholarly communication projects of the **MetaScholar Initiative** (<http://www.MetaScholar.org>). The staff of Digital Innovations includes librarians, scholarly communication analysts, and systems programmers/support staff. He is the principal investigator for research projects totaling \$5M. He recently established the **MetaArchive Digital Preservation Network** (<http://www.MetaArchive.org>), a cooperative of ten university libraries and other cultural memory organizations acting in concert with the **Library of Congress** as part of the **National Digital Preservation Program**.

**Martin** has a Ph.D. from **Emory University**, an M.L.I.S. from the **University of Texas**, and a B.A. from **Rice University**. **Martin** has worked in library administration and systems positions at **Emory University** and **Rice University**. He served as an **ALA/USIA Library Fellow** in Estonia assisting with the automation of the **Tartu University Library**. He has also worked as a consultant for the **IBM Corporation**, and as a programmer for the **University of Texas**. He is married and has three children.



**HOW/WHERE DO WE SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** We believe that academic libraries are poised at a fairly serious crossroads, particularly now that we are in the throes of a major recession. If librarians choose to function primarily as intermediaries seeking to coordinate the access and preservation functions for our campuses through outsourcing contracts to external entities, the value we add to the academic enterprise will greatly diminish and we will ultimately become a study hall / museum of aging physical media relics. If we alternatively choose to meet the digital information needs of our campuses ourselves, the value of research libraries will grow as vital and experimental arenas of scholarly inquiry and engagement with knowledge. The latter path is less charted and requires more experimentation, but is (we think) clearly preferable as a course for the future. 🌱